

## CLAIMS

I (we) claim:

1           1. In a public computer network connecting a buyer organization and two  
2 or more supplier computers each having a browser, wherein the supplier computers are  
3 coupled to a set of one or more server computers associated with the buyer organization over  
4 the public computer network, a method comprising:

5                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, providing an  
6 auction information electronic form, wherein the auction information electronic form  
7 includes two or more data input fields and a task assignment section, wherein the task  
8 assignment section comprises:

9                 individual assignment fields that identify at least first and second  
10 individuals in the buyer organization, and

11                 at least first and second task fields that permit a user to assign or modify  
12 tasks to the first and second individuals in the buyer organization, respectively,  
13 wherein the tasks correspond to tasks to be performed before an auction;

14                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, receiving data  
15 input provided to the auction form, including input to the two or more data input fields and to  
16 the task assignment section, wherein the data input to the task assignment section comprises:

17                 flagging the first and second individuals in the buyer organization for  
18 tasks under the individual assignment fields, and

19                 assigning or modifying first and second tasks for the first and second  
20 individuals in the buyer organization under the first and second task fields, all  
21 respectively;

22                 at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, creating a new  
23 reverse auction based on an identified item to procure, wherein the auction is to be conducted  
24 at some time in the future;

25                   at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, electronically  
26 notifying the first and second individuals in the buyer organization of the new reverse  
27 auction and the assigned or modified first and second tasks, respectively; and

28                   at at least one server computer in the set of server computers, receiving input  
29 from the first and second individuals in the buyer organization that the respective first and  
30 second tasks have been completed.

1                   2.       The method of claim 1 wherein the public computer network is the  
2 World Wide Web, wherein the browser is a web browser,

3                   wherein the auction form is a web page form stored in a central database  
4 coupled to at least one server computer in the set of server computers;

5                   wherein the two or more data input fields of the auction form include a  
6 commodity field, a mandatory auction date field, a mandatory auction name field and an  
7 auction type field;

8                   wherein the task assignment section comprises first and second due date fields  
9 associated respectively with the first and second task fields and having default due dates  
10 based on the auction date field, and wherein the individual assignment fields correspond to at  
11 least two individuals in the buyer organization selected from a set comprising: an auction  
12 owner, a quality assurance individual, a global commodity leader and a pole representative;

13                   wherein the first and second tasks under the first and second task fields  
14 correspond to two tasks selected from a task set comprising: approve suppliers to participate  
15 in an auction by the auction owner, approve a supplier for participation in the auction by the  
16 quality assurance individual, approve the auction by the global commodity leader, and  
17 identify at least one supplier in the pole representative's corresponding geographic pole by  
18 the pole representative; and

19                   wherein at least one server computer in the set of server computers employs  
20 logic to check time spans between a date input to the auction date field and due dates  
21 corresponding to the first and second task fields.

1                   3.       A system for facilitating procurement of an item under an auction from  
2 one of two or more suppliers, the system comprising:

3                   at least one server computer, wherein the server computer is operable:

4                   to provide an auction information electronic form, wherein the auction  
5                   information electronic form includes at least one data input field and a task  
6                   assignment section, wherein the task assignment section comprises at least first and  
7                   second task fields respectively associated with tasks for first and second individuals or  
8                   organizational positions, wherein at least one of the tasks corresponds to a task to be  
9                   performed before an auction;

10                  to receive data input provided to the auction information electronic  
11                  form, including input to the at least one data input field to create a new auction based  
12                  on an identified item to procure, wherein the auction is to be conducted at a selected  
13                  time in the future, and wherein the task assignment section identifies first and second  
14                  tasks for the first and second individuals or organizational positions under the first and  
15                  second task fields, all respectively; and

16                  to electronically notify the first and second individuals of the first and  
17                  second tasks, respectively, before the auction.

1                  4.         The system of claim 3 wherein a private computer network couples the  
2                  server computer with a buyer computer, associated with a buyer organization, and the private  
3                  computer network is coupled, via public computer network, to two or more supplier  
4                  computers, associated respectively with the two or more suppliers, and wherein the server  
5                  computer includes a database coupled thereto, wherein the auction form is a display  
6                  description stored in the database, and wherein the database centrally stores previously  
7                  completed auction forms for previously conducted auctions for retrieval and modification for  
8                  a new auction;

9                  wherein the auction information electronic form has at least two mandatory  
10                 data input fields, wherein the mandatory data input fields include an auction date field, and a  
11                 commodity field, an auction name field or an auction type field;

12                 wherein the task assignment section comprises:

13                 individual assignment fields that identify at least first and second  
14                 individuals in the buyer organization, and

15                 first and second due date fields associated respectively with the first and  
16                 second task fields and having default due dates based on the auction date field; and

17                 wherein the server computer is further operable:

18                   to permit a user to assign new tasks, modify existing tasks or accept  
19                   default tasks assigned by the server computer with respect to the at least first and  
20                   second task fields,

21                   to receive input from at least one of the first and second individuals that  
22                   the respective first or second task has been completed, and

23                   to check time spans between a date input to the auction date field and  
24                   due dates corresponding to the first and second task fields.

1                 5.         The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is coupled to a  
2                   database;

3                   wherein the auction information electronic form is a web page form stored in a  
4                   central database coupled to the server computer;

5                   wherein the task assignment section comprises individual assignment fields  
6                   and first and second due date fields, wherein the first and second due date fields are  
7                   associated respectively with the first and second task fields and have default due dates  
8                   provided by the server computer, and wherein the individual assignment fields correspond to  
9                   at least two organizational positions selected from a set comprising: an auction owner, a  
10                  quality assurance individual, a global commodity leader, and a pole representative;

11                  wherein the first and second tasks under the first and second task fields  
12                  correspond to two tasks selected from a task set comprising: selecting suppliers to participate  
13                  in an auction, approving a supplier for participation in the auction, approving the auction,  
14                  and identifying at least one supplier in a geographic pole.

1                 6.         The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further operable  
2                  to provide task reminders to the first and second individuals.

1                 7.         The system of claim 3 wherein the auction information electronic form  
2                  comprises two or more mandatory, standard fields, and at least first and second optional  
3                  comment fields associated with the first and second task fields, respectively.

1           8. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is coupled to a  
2 database and wherein the database centrally stores previously completed auction forms to be  
3 retrieved and modified for a new auction.

1           9. The system of claim 3 wherein the auction information electronic form  
2 comprises at least two mandatory data input fields, wherein the mandatory data input fields  
3 include an auction date field, and a commodity field, an auction name field or an auction  
4 type field.

1           10. The system of claim 3 wherein electronically notifying includes  
2 identifying, for review or approval, at least one electronic document in a central library for  
3 association with the auction.

1           11. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further operable  
2 to automatically provide approval after a due date passes without the first task being  
3 completed.

1           12. The system of claim 3 wherein electronically notifying includes sending  
2 first and second electronic mail messages to the first and second individuals and storing at  
3 least one electronic document at a network location, wherein the electronic document may be  
4 accessed by a remote computer via a public computer network.

1           13. The system of claim 3 wherein electronically notifying includes sending  
2 first and second electronic mail messages to the first and second individuals.

1           14. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further operable  
2 to permit a user to assign new tasks, modify existing tasks or accept default tasks assigned by  
3 the server computer with respect to at least the first and second task fields.

1               15. The system of claim 3 wherein the server computer is further operable  
2 to check time spans between a date of the auction and data input fields in the auction  
3 information electronic form.

1               16. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a computer system  
2 to assist in procuring an item from one of a plurality of suppliers, by:

3               providing an auction information electronic form, wherein the auction  
4 information electronic form includes at least one data input field and a task assignment  
5 section, wherein the task assignment section comprises at least first and second task fields  
6 respectively associated with tasks for first and second individuals or organizational positions,  
7 wherein at least one of the tasks corresponds to a task to be performed before an auction;

8               receiving information provided to the auction information electronic form,  
9 including the mandatory data input field, to create a new auction with respect to the item to  
10 procure, wherein the task assignment section identifies first and second tasks for the first and  
11 second individuals or organizational positions under the first and second task fields, all  
12 respectively; and

13               before the auction, electronically notifying the first and second individuals of  
14 the first and second tasks, respectively.

1               17. The computer-readable medium of claim 16, further comprising:  
2               providing task reminders to the first and second individuals.

1               18. The computer-readable medium of claim 16, further comprising  
2 permitting a user to assign new tasks, modify existing tasks or accept default tasks with  
3 respect to at least the first and second task fields.

1               19. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the auction  
2 information electronic form comprises at least two mandatory data input fields, wherein the  
3 mandatory data input fields include an auction date field, and a commodity field, an auction  
4 name field or an auction type field.

1           20. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein electronically  
2 notifying includes identifying, for review or approval, at least one electronic document in a  
3 central library for association with the auction.

1           21. The computer-readable medium of claim 16, further comprising  
2 providing automatic approval after a due date passes without the first task being completed.

1           22. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein electronically  
2 notifying includes sending first and second electronic mail messages to the first and second  
3 individuals and storing at least one electronic document at a network location, wherein the  
4 electronic document may be accessed by a remote computer via a public computer network.

1           23. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein electronically  
2 notifying includes sending first and second electronic mail messages to the first and second  
3 individuals.

1           24. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a logical node in a computer network receiving the contents.

1           25. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a computer-readable disk.

1           26. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a data transmission medium transmitting a generated data signal  
3 containing the contents.

1           27. The computer-readable medium of claim 16 wherein the computer-  
2 readable medium is a memory of a computer system.

1           28. A computer-readable medium containing a data structure having  
2 information for display and to assist in procuring an item from one of a plurality of suppliers  
3 under an auction, the information comprising:

4                 a display description defining an auction information electronic form for  
5 creating a new auction with respect to the item to procure, wherein the display description  
6 comprises at least first and second mandatory data input portions and a task assignment  
7 portion, wherein the first mandatory data input portion corresponds to an auction date field  
8 and the second mandatory data input portion corresponds to a commodity field, an auction  
9 name field or an auction type field, and wherein the task assignment portion comprises at  
10 least first and second task fields respectively associated with tasks for first and second  
11 individuals or organizational positions, wherein at least one of the tasks corresponds to a task  
12 to be performed before an auction.

1           29. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the task assignment  
2 portion includes:

3                 individual assignment portions corresponding to individual assignment fields  
4 that identify at least the first and second individuals or organizational positions, and

5                 first and second due date portions corresponding respectively to first and  
6 second due date fields, wherein the first and second due date fields are associated  
7 respectively with the first and second task fields.

1           30. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 includes instructions for the display of the information.

1           31. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 represents a Web page.

1           32. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 represents a document for display.

1               33. The computer-readable medium of claim 28 wherein the data structure  
2 is a data transmission medium transmitting a generated data signal containing the data  
3 structure.

1               34. A system to assist in procuring items from one of a plurality of  
2 suppliers, comprising:

3               means for providing an auction information electronic form, wherein the  
4 auction information electronic form includes at least one data input field and a task  
5 assignment section, wherein the task assignment section comprises at least first and second  
6 task fields respectively associated with tasks for first and second individuals or  
7 organizational positions, wherein at least one of the tasks corresponds to a task to be  
8 performed before an auction;

9               means for receiving information provided to the auction information electronic  
10 form, including the mandatory data input field, to create a new auction with respect to the  
11 item to procure, wherein the task assignment section identifies first and second tasks for the  
12 first and second individuals or organizational positions under the first and second task fields,  
13 all respectively; and

14               before the auction, means, coupled to the means for providing and the means  
15 for receiving, for electronically notifying the first and second individuals of the first and  
16 second tasks, respectively.

1               35. The system of claim 34, further comprising:

2               means for permitting a user to assign new tasks, modify existing tasks or accept  
3 default tasks with respect to the at least first and second task fields,

4               means for receiving input from at least one of the first and second individuals  
5 that the respective first or second task has been completed, and

6               means for checking time spans between a date input to the auction date field  
7 and due dates corresponding to the first and second task fields.